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U.S. Aide, Abducted in Beirut, Seen on Videotape

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON — One of five Americans apparently kidnapped in Beirut over the last 10 months was seen today in a 56-second videotape in which he called on the United States to "take action for our release quickly."

However, the American, William Buckley, a political officer in the United States Embassy in Beirut, did not specify what Washington had to do to gain freedom for the five.

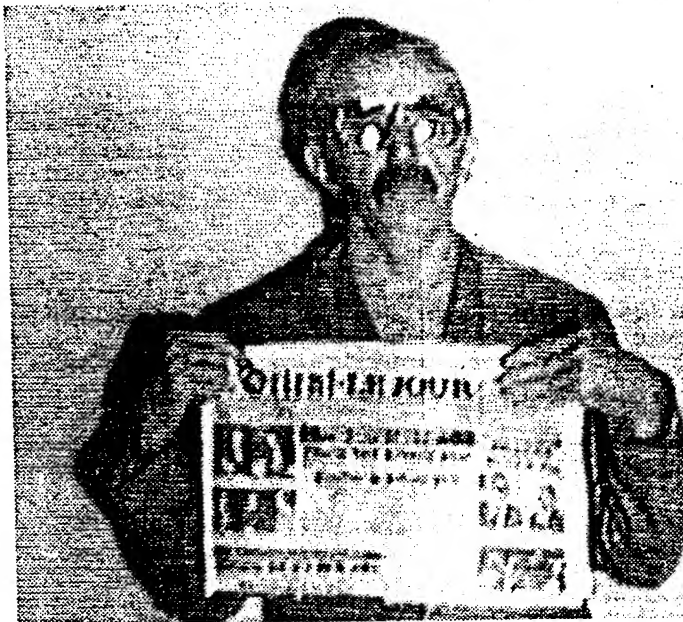
On the videotape, Mr. Buckley said that he and two other missing Americans were well. He mentioned Jeremy Levin, the Beirut bureau chief for the Cable News Network, and the Rev. Benjamin M. Weir, a Presbyterian minister.

He made no mention of the two Americans most recently listed as missing in Beirut, Peter Kilburn, a librarian at the American University, who failed to report to work on Dec. 3 and is presumed kidnapped, and the Rev. Martin Lawrence Jenco, a Roman Catholic priest who headed the Catholic Relief Services office, who was seized on Jan. 8.

Many Unanswered Questions

The videotape, initially released by a private, London-based television news agency, appeared to have been made by Mr. Buckley's captors in the last week.

The tape did not clear up the uncertainty over who is holding the Americans, where they are, whether all five are being held by the same group and what the conditions are for their release.



Videos

William Buckley, a U.S. diplomat, in videotape apparently made recently.

It was learned from non-Government sources today that another videotape was sent secretly to the State Department last July and that the earlier tape might provide a clue to the unexplained statement by Mr. Buckley.

That videotape, whose existence was confirmed by Reagan Administration officials, showed Mr. Levin, Mr. Weir and Mr. Buckley, with Mr. Levin making a statement calling for the release of prisoners held by Kuwait.

Kuwait arrested 17 Shiite Moslems in connection with explosions at the American and French embassies and at Kuwaiti Government buildings in Kuwait in December 1983.

Release of those prisoners was also the demand made by the hijackers of a

Kuwaiti airliner that was forced to fly to Teheran last month. The hijackers, who killed two American officials aboard the plane before eventually being taken into Iranian custody, failed to win the release of the prisoners.

A senior State Department official said, however, that it was not definite the Beirut abductors were demanding the release of the prisoners in Kuwait as the condition for freeing the Americans. Recent telephone calls to news agencies in Beirut have demanded that all Americans leave Lebanon.

State Department officials said today that American officials had not publicized the original tape in order to make it easier to conduct quiet diplomatic efforts through the Syrians and other channels. It was shown, however, to Cable News Network executives, they said.

President Reagan, commenting today, said he could not reveal details of American diplomatic efforts, but said, "Believe me, this is very much on our minds."

A State Department official said, "We honestly don't know for sure who we are dealing with, or where the prisoners are, or how many there are, or

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what we are supposed to do to get them released."

Anonymous phone calls in Beirut have said the five Americans were being held by Islamic Holy War. Many officials believe this is a name used by a number of extremist Shiite groups in Beirut.

The videotape released today was first shown to reporters by Visnews, a television news syndicate founded by Reuters, the British Broadcasting Corporation and the national broadcasting companies of Australia, Canada and New Zealand.

Its managing editor, Kevin Hamilton, would not say how Visnews got the

tape. It was subsequently shown by NBC News on the program "Today."

In the tape, Mr. Buckley, who is 56 years old, was shown wearing a brown jacket and standing before a blank wall. He held up the Jan. 22 issue of a French-language Beirut daily, "L'Orient-Le Jour."

"Today, the 22d of January 1985, I am well and my friends Benjamin Weir and Jeremy Levin are also well," Mr. Buckley said. "We ask that our Government take action for our release quickly."

Mr. Hamilton said his agency had not received any written statements with the tape.

Mr. Levin's wife, Lucille, said in an interview on the "Today" program that she thought the tape was "a very good sign." She said it was a signal for negotiations, but she pointed out that Mr. Buckley had mispronounced the name of her husband as leh-VEEN instead of LEHV-in.

"Apparently they are not being held in the same room," she said. "Two men who've been held together for a year would at least get their last names correct."

A State Department official, who also noted the mispronunciation, said it was possible that Mr. Buckley was sending some kind of signal by the mistake.

President Reagan, when he was asked by reporters today what the United States was doing to obtain the

prisoners' release, said, "That's something we can't talk about."

"But believe me," he continued, "this is very much on our minds. We haven't forgotten that they're in captivity. I don't think it would be productive for us to talk about what we're doing."

Asked if the efforts were making progress, Mr. Reagan replied, "I'm not going to tell the score."

Mr. Levin disappeared last March 7 and was assumed to have been abducted. Mr. Buckley was seen being kidnapped as he left his apartment house on March 16. Mr. Weir was seen being seized by gunmen last May 8.